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ABSTRACT

These guides describe the New York State testing program and other performance measures for elementary and secondary school students and provide answers to frequently asked questions about these assessments. The New York State School Report Card is composed of "An Overview of Academic Performance" and "A Comprehensive Information Report." The "Overview" includes information on the performance of 4th graders on the English language arts, mathematics, and science assessments; of 8th graders on the English language arts and mathematics assessments, and of students who entered 9th grade in the fall 1996 and 1997 on the Board of Regents English and Mathematics Examinations. It reports school performance on accountability measures, enrollments, and school demographic data. School and district statistics are provided in separate reports. The "Comprehensive Information Report" presents 3 years of results on all other state assessments, including Regents Examinations, Second Language Proficiency Examinations, Regents Competency Tests, and Occupational Education Proficiency Examinations. The questions and answers that accompany these descriptions of the testing program focus on the New York learning standards and how the school report cards help parents ensure that their schools meet or exceed the state standards. (SLD)

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UNDERSTANDING YOUR SCHOOL REPORT CARD 2001

Guide to Secondary School Assessments
and
Guide to Elementary and Middle School Assessments

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New York State Education Department
Information, Reporting & Technology Services

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UNDERSTANDING YOUR SCHOOL REPORT CARD 2001

Guide to Secondary School Assessments

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Introduction

The ***New York State School Report Card*** is an important part of the Board of Regents effort to raise learning standards for all students. It is designed to provide information to the public on student performance and other measures of school and district performance. This guide provides answers to frequently asked questions and describes the State testing program and other performance measures. Knowledge gained from the school report card on a school's strengths and weaknesses can be used to plan programs and curriculum and to allocate resources. When reviewing school performance, remember that small differences

among schools and small year-to-year changes are not meaningful.

This year's school report card is composed of complementary parts:

- *An Overview of Academic Performance*, and
- *A Comprehensive Information Report.*

The *Overview* includes performance of fourth-graders on the English language arts (ELA), mathematics and science assessments; of eighth-graders on the English language arts (ELA) and mathematics assessments; and of students who entered ninth grade in fall 1996 and 1997 on Regents English and mathematics examinations. It reports school performance on accountability measures, enrollments, and school demographic data. School and district statistics are provided in separate reports. The school report compares the school's results with those of schools that are similar, and the companion school district report compares school district with statewide results.

The *Comprehensive Information Report (CIR)* presents three years of results on all other State assessments: Regents Examinations, Second Language Proficiency Examinations, Regents Competency Tests, and Occupational Education Proficiency Examinations. The CIR provides information on high school completers; attendance, suspension and dropout rates, student enrollments and demographics; and professional staff.

Questions & Answers

Q. ***What are the learning standards?***

A. The Board of Regents has established learning standards in seven curriculum areas. They describe broad expectations of what students should know, understand and be able to do as they progress through grades K-12 in New York State schools.

Q . ***What is the relationship between the school report card and the learning standards?***

A. Both are part of the statewide strategy for raising the level of student achievement. The strategy includes:

- **establishing standards in seven curriculum areas;**
- **changing the testing program to reflect the higher standards;**
- **raising high school graduation requirements;**
- **building the capacity of schools to help students achieve the standards;**
- **ensuring high standards and support for teachers and administrators;**
- **building partnerships to improve student achievement;**
- **establishing the System of Accountability for Student Success (SASS); and**
- **increasing accountability through public reporting of student performance.**

Q. What is the System of Accountability for Student Success (SASS)?

A. Over time, all schools in the State are expected to increase the percentages of their students who demonstrate proficiency in English language arts and mathematics. SASS is a means to hold schools accountable for meeting State standards.

Q. ***What are the State standards?***

A. The State standards in a given year are the performance levels established by the Commissioner as representing acceptable progress toward the State goal of proficiency for all students. Based on each relevant State standard, a school falls into one of three categories: meeting the standard, below the standard, and farthest from the standard.

There are three performance criteria for high schools: the percentages of the annual high school cohort who have met their individual graduation requirements in English language arts and inmathematics and the annual dropout rate.

Q. ***What happens to schools who score below the State standard?***

A. The State assigns adequate yearly progress targets to each school below a State standard. Districts must develop a local assistance plan for such schools. The plan must include activities to improve performance of all students and to enable the school to meet or exceed State standards.

Q. *What happens when there are too few students in a school to make a judgment about the school's performance?*

A. **No judgment about performance will be made until a school has had a minimum of 20 students tested on a standard. The school's position relative to the standards will be assessed by combining student performance over two or three years, as necessary to make the judgment on a minimum of 20 students.**

Q. ***How will school report cards help parents ensure that their schools are meeting or exceeding the State standards?***

A. The school report card shows whether or not schools are meeting the State standards. The report card also shows the adequate yearly progress targets that have been assigned to schools below the standards and whether schools are meeting these targets. Parents can use the school report cards to see how well a school is performing and the trends in student performance relative to the State standards.

Q. *What are the requirements for a high school diploma?*

A. Students who enter grade 9 before September 2001 must complete 18 units of study. These units must include four in English, four in social studies, two in science, two in mathematics, one in art and/or music, and one-half unit in health education, as well as prescribed course sequences. Beginning with the class who entered high school in the fall of 1996, general-education students are required to pass the Regents English examination to earn a local diploma. General-education students who first entered grade 9 in the fall of 1997 are required to pass a Regents examination in mathematics. Additional Regents examination requirements have been implemented with each new ninth grade class. To earn a Regents diploma, a student generally must have completed three units in a language other than English and passed a minimum of eight Regents examinations.

To ensure that all students have the opportunity to demonstrate achievement of the standards, the Board of Regents established safety net provisions, including a five-year phase-in of the requirement that students pass five Regents examinations; the option for districts to award local diplomas to students scoring 55-64 on required Regents examinations; and allowing students with disabilities who fail a Regents examination to demonstrate competency using the Regents competency test in that subject area.

Q. *What other revisions have been made to the graduation requirements?*

A. Beginning with students who enter ninth grade in 2001, all students will be required to pass at least five Regents examinations and earn at least 22 units of credit, including four units in English, four in social studies, three in mathematics, three in science, one in the arts, one in a language other than English, one-half in health, and two in physical education. Higher requirements have been established for an advanced designation on the Regents diploma.

Q. *How is the performance of students with disabilities reported?*

A. Results for students with disabilities are displayed for all State assessments and for diplomas earned. Students with disabilities may use modified testing procedures specified in their individualized education program, so caution should be used when comparing results among schools.

Q. *How is the performance of English language learners (ELL), formerly referred to as limited English proficient (LEP) students, assessed and reported?*

A. All general-education students, including ELLs, who first entered grade 9 in 1996-97 or later, will be required to score 55 or higher on the Regents English examination. The Regents examination in sequential mathematics course I is now available in five alternative-language editions. Alternative-language editions of all required Regents examinations except English and of all Regents competency tests are available.

Q. *How can parents help their children meet higher standards?*

A. Parents can help children by knowing the school's expectations of students and by monitoring children's learning and homework.

Q. *What are similar schools?*

A. To help parents and community members determine how their school compares with schools that serve similar students and have similar resources, we have established *Similar School* groups. The following factors are considered in grouping schools: a) grade levels the school serves; b) rates of student poverty and ELLs; and c) the income and property wealth of district residents.

The measure of student poverty is the proportion of children in the school who participate in the free-lunch program. Free-lunch participation declines in higher grades. Nonetheless, since groups are composed of schools serving similar grades, we believe this is a valid approach.

Q. *How can I get more information on the school report card and the new higher standards?*

A. You may call the State Education Department at (518) 474-7965 or e-mail us at rptcard@mail.nysed.gov. Copies of the New York State Report Card for all public schools and districts, information on the standards and new State assessments, and other information can be found on our Website: http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/.

The State Testing Program

Secondary-Level Examinations

The report card shows three years of results for all secondary-level examinations. Regents examinations are achievement tests based on courses of study used in grades 9-12. They provide schools with a basis for evaluating the quality of instruction and learning and give students information with which to make educational and vocational decisions. The Regents Competency Tests were established to allow students not participating in Regents courses to demonstrate competency for graduation. Beginning with the class who enters grade 9 in 2001, all students will be required to demonstrate competency using Regents examinations. Second Language Proficiency Examinations measure the performance of eighth- and ninth-graders in learning a second language. Occupational Education Proficiency Examinations measure skills acquired in courses preparing students for careers.

Other Measures

- ***Dropout Rate*** – A dropout is any student who left school before graduation for any reason except death and did not enter another school or high school equivalency preparation program.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR SCHOOL REPORT CARD 2001

Guide to Elementary and Middle School Assessments

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standard, and farthest from the standard.

The State standards at the elementary and middle levels are based on the State assessments in English language arts and mathematics. At these grade levels, the Commissioner will annually establish the standard for each measure based on the Performance Index. The Commissioner has established the following standards for 2000-01, 2001-02, and 2002-03, respectively: 140, 145, and 150.

Q. ***What is the Performance Index?***

A. The Performance Index is used to measure the performance of schools on the elementary- and middle-level criteria. The Index credits schools for the students demonstrating some of the assessed learning standards (Level 2) and for students demonstrating all of the assessed learning standards (Levels 3 and 4). Schools receive more credit for students at Levels 3 and 4 than for students at Level 2. They receive no credit for students at Level 1. The Index ranges from 0 to 200. Schools improve their Index by decreasing the percentage of students performing at Level 1 and increasing the percentage at Levels 3 and 4.

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Q. *What information is provided about students with disabilities?*

A. The performance of students with disabilities on the grades 4 and 8 tests is reported. Some students with disabilities were exempted from these tests because of their disability. This exemption is stated in the individualized educational program (IEP), developed by the district Committee on Special Education.

Because students with disabilities may use modified testing procedures specified in their individualized program, caution should be used when comparing results among schools.

Q. *How is the performance of English Language Learners (ELL), formerly referred to as limited English proficient (LEP) students, assessed and reported?*

A. In grades 4 and 8, ELLs who are not ready to participate effectively in the academic program are not required to take the State ELA assessment. Instead, their progress in learning English is measured and reported. The school report card shows the number of students in this category and the number who have made appropriate progress in acquiring English. The mathematics and science tests are translated into other languages for use by ELL students.

Q. *What are the new requirements for a high school diploma?*

A. The Board of Regents has established more rigorous graduation requirements. Beginning with students who enter ninth grade in 2001, all students will be required to pass at least five Regents examinations and earn at least 22 units of credit, including four units in English, four in social studies, three in mathematics, three in science, one in the arts, one in a language other than English, one-half in health, and two in physical education. Higher requirements have been established for an advanced designation on the Regents diploma.

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The State Testing Program

Elementary English Language Arts

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Elementary Mathematics

Elementary Science

Middle-Level English Language Arts

Middle-Level Mathematics

These tests are designed to help ensure that all students reach the higher learning standards. The tests challenge students to demonstrate their ability to read, write, listen and use mathematics and science, and show whether students are getting the foundation knowledge they need to succeed in later grades.

On the ELA and mathematics tests, performance is indicated in four levels, each encompassing a range of scores. The levels, defined in the Overview, describe how well students are progressing on the standards. Performance is reported in terms of mean scale scores and the percentage of all tested students who scored at each of the four levels.

On the elementary science test, mean scores are reported on the written test and on the performance test. In addition, the percentage of students who have exceeded the State Designated Level on the written test is reported.

School districts must develop a plan for providing appropriate academic intervention services to students who score at Levels 1 and 2 on the ELA and math tests and for students who score below the State Designated Level on the science test.

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